DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 163 UD 032 718

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TITLE	How Community Efforts To Reduce Substance Abuse Have Influenced Race Relations. Lessons Learned Conferences Seminar Report (Cleveland, Ohio, March 30-31, 1998).
INSTITUTION	Join Together, Boston, MA.
SPONS AGENCY	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, NJ.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	15p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Join Together, 441 Stuart Street, Seventh Floor, Boston, MA 02116; Tel: 617-437-1500; Fax: 617-437-9394; Web site: www.jointogether.org; e-mail: info@jointogether.org
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Action; Cooperation; Cultural Differences; Ethnicity; *Prevention; Program Descriptions; Racial Differences; *Racial Relations; *Substance Abuse; Urban Problems; Urban Youth

ABSTRACT

A series of meetings with leaders from six communities explored how efforts to reduce substance abuse may be affecting race relations. Leaders from these communities, located in Los Angeles (California), Mobile (Alabama), Gallup (New Mexico), Kansas City (Missouri), San Francisco (California), and Vallejo (California), spoke about discord between racial groups and the tensions of cultural and ethnic diversity. The participants arrived at a consensus that local race relations had improved as a consequence of working together to reduce substance abuse. Common themes were identified from the various experiences of these communities: (1) a common cause can bring diverse groups together; (2) it is important to understand and acknowledge diversity within racial groups; (3) it is important to involve community residents and institutional leaders as participants of equal status; and (4) local governments can be instrumental in facilitating constructive community efforts. Brief profiles provide more specific information about the substance abuse efforts in each of the communities. Critical questions to be considered in implementing substance abuse programs with implications for race relations are posed. (SLD)

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How Community Efforts to Reduce Substance Abuse Have Influenced Race Relations.

Lessons Learned Conferences
Seminar Report 1998

Join Together

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Join Together

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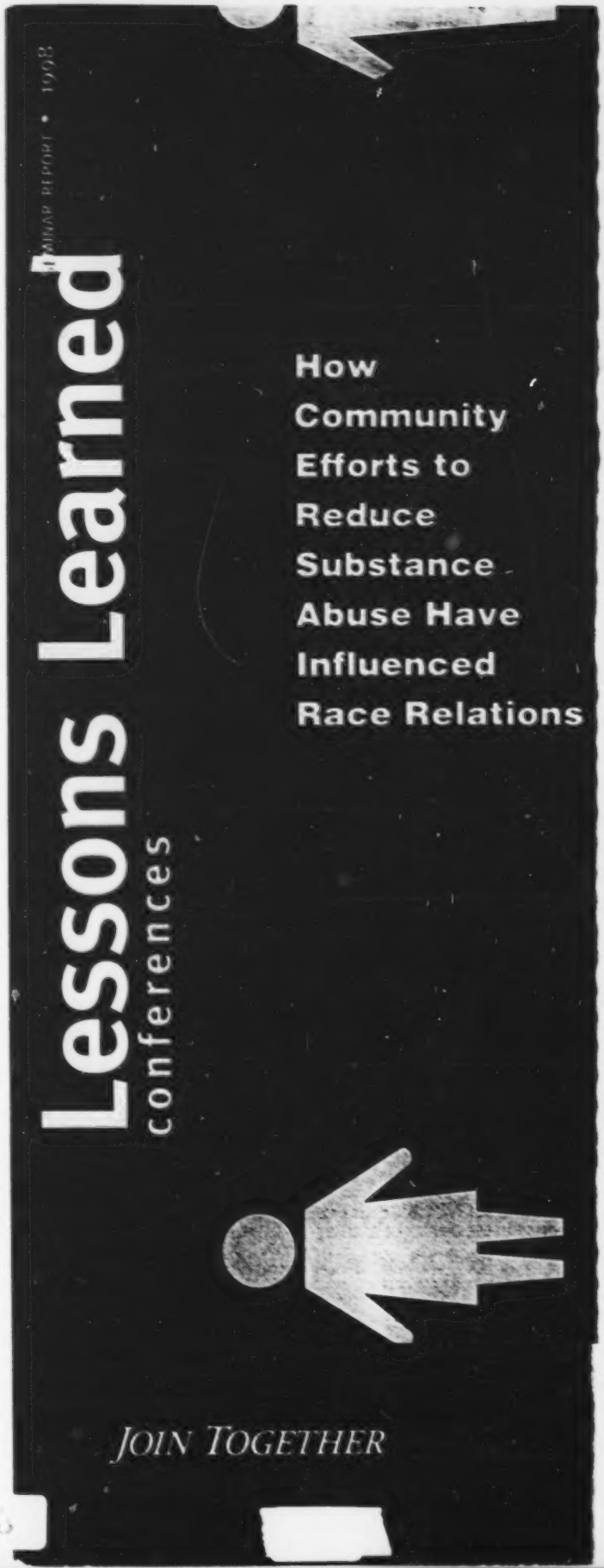
Lessons Learned
conferences
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Lessons Learned
conferences

How Community Efforts to Reduce Substance Abuse Have Influenced Race Relations

Dear Colleague

Race, ethnicity, and class are central elements in American community life. Racial or ethnic stereotypes, usually inaccurate, are often used to characterize a community's drug or alcohol problems. Therefore, it makes sense to ask if there are lessons to be learned about racial and ethnic issues from communities' attempts to deal with drugs and alcohol. There are, and some of them are described below.

Issues of race, ethnicity or class were at or near the surface of virtually every community participating in a conference from which the material for this newsletter was drawn. Nevertheless, it was difficult for people to talk openly about the subject. Intra-group and class tensions were particularly hard to discuss. We are grateful for the participants' candor and courage.

A consensus emerged from both the background research for the conference and the discussions that took place that community anti-substance abuse efforts have made a positive contribution to racial, ethnic and class issues. Most participants felt that they and their communities are a bit better equipped to deal with future tensions.

We hope the lessons shared in this document will help people in other communities understand and address the racial, ethnic and class issues that affect their work. We urge people to talk about them openly. We ask that you tell us about your own experiences so that we can continue to share lessons learned with others.

David L. Rosenbloom
Director
Join Together

In the spring of 1998, Join Together and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation convened a series of meetings with leaders from six communities to explore how their efforts to reduce substance abuse may be affecting local race relations. The participants were often guarded and were careful to be politically correct in approaching the topic. They shared stories from diverse perspectives and experiences that included economic and political conflict, power, oppression, and privilege. They spoke about discord between racial groups and recounted the tensions of cultural and ethnic diversity among persons within the same race. They told true stories of how they struggled to overcome these impediments to develop and pursue a collective vision of a community free from the devastation of alcohol and other drugs.

None of these groups set out to focus on race relations directly. Neither did they plan to ignore issues of race. The participants from the six communities did arrive at a consensus that local race relations had improved as a consequence of working together to address substance abuse, and could perhaps serve as a base for addressing racial issues in the future.

In all of these communities, complex economic, political and personal conflicts remain among and between all racial groups. However, all recognized that when people work together towards a shared interest that transcends race, they have opportunities to learn about each other and to get to know each other under different circumstances. Hopefully, the by-product of these new experiences is mutual trust. That mutual trust can produce even more opportunities to address other complex, volatile and deep-seated issues of race.

Each of these six communities is unique. There are, however, common themes among them. These "lessons learned" can be valuable tools for other communities confronting similar issues. Please read about their experiences and consider how they might be relevant to your own community.

Lessons Learned:

- **A common cause can bring diverse groups together.**
- **It is important to understand and acknowledge diversity within racial groups.**
- **It is important to involve community residents and institutional leaders as participants of equal stature.**
- **Local governments can be instrumental in facilitating constructive community efforts.**

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Lesson #1

A common cause can bring diverse groups together.

When diverse groups join together to solve common problems, they can find new ground on which to build relationships and bridge their differences. The mutual goal of reducing substance abuse can be such a catalyst to bring groups together and launch the process of acknowledging racial and cultural differences.

In San Francisco, there was extreme tension among new Vietnamese immigrants and historically dominant African Americans in public housing developments. Racial tensions erupted in neighborhoods, in schools and on city buses as these two groups competed for decreasing public resources. Despite their differences, however, these groups shared a common concern over the excessive alcohol use and abuse that affected the lives of Vietnamese and African Americans living in public housing developments.

Initially, Vietnamese and African American groups worked on their own substance abuse problems in separate efforts funded by the Mayor's Criminal Justice Council. As they became more experienced in their own projects, these two groups began to consult with each other to jointly address their common concern of excessive alcohol use. Substance abuse was an issue for both groups that transcended race and offered them an opportunity to share strategies, and to learn more about each other.

Working on a common problem may defuse racial tensions between different groups more effectively than directly confronting specific race issues. In San Francisco, reducing the abuse of alcohol was more important than racial and cultural differences. In this case, the tangible nature of the substance abuse issue transcended the racial gulf and tensions that separated the groups. Other communities have had similar experiences. In Mobile, Alabama, shared interest in cleaning up trash bridged racial, residential, and economic lines to produce concrete, visible results (see box on page 10 for more details). And citizens in Los Angeles had to address economic conflicts between storeowners and residents to lessen racial tension (see sidebar for more details).

Building Relationships

Even when there is a concrete, shared issue that concerns diverse groups, the way the problem impacts different people can present new challenges. "Substance abuse is a unifying theme for people to come together but it also illuminates the differences between groups," explains Elize Brown, former Director for Fighting Back in Oakland, California. Differences don't melt away in the light of a common goal. Trust and mutual respect will

result from groups' willingness to embrace strategies that will have a real impact on their mutual problems. Commitment to a common cause can provide a constructive vehicle for people from diverse groups to get to know and learn from each other.

A story from Vallejo, California, illustrates how a common interest can pave the way for people to develop trust and mutual respect in their relationships. Two members of the Vallejo Fighting Back Community Partnership were in constant conflict with each other. One community leader was a Latino man. The other person was a White man who was a member of one of the Partnership's committees. Their conflict seemed to be deeper than differences over strategy. The missing ingredients, they say, were trust and respect. The White committee member had never visited the Latino leader in his home or at his office. He had never acknowledged his Latino colleague's leadership, work, or ethnic community before they began focusing on efforts to reduce substance abuse. Once the committee member began visiting the Latino leader's community simply to pay his respects, they began to establish mutual trust. This process of building respect made a big difference in improving the relationship between these two colleagues.

A shared commitment to reduce substance abuse offered these men an opportunity to bridge their diverse racial experiences in a way that built trust in their relationship. People who meet in each other's homes and neighborhoods, and who get to know one another on a personal level can build trust not as an end itself but as a by-product of working together on common tasks with common goals.

These six communities are addressing race relations indirectly by bringing different racial, cultural and class groups together to work on problems that affect them all. Familiarity that develops from working together on common problems can motivate people of different races to work together on other issues. They are able to bridge their differences, acknowledge one another, and come to have greater trust and respect for one another.

South Central Los Angeles Residents Diffuse Racial Tensions with Shared Economic Concern

In South Central Los Angeles, the media continually characterized the neighborhood's economic problems as issues of race relations. In the wake of the Rodney King trial and civil uprising, South Central was a tinderbox.

Media coverage depicted the tension between Korean storeowners and African American residents as being racially motivated. Yet the real community issues were economic, played out in the midst of a racially charged atmosphere, according to Karen Bass, Executive Director of the community coalition in South Central.

The real story was that storeowners were struggling to rebuild their businesses in a neighborhood that had been historically over-saturated with alcohol outlets. Meanwhile, community leaders banded together to limit the reopening of liquor store outlets that had contributed to the decimation of South Central's neighborhoods. The community coalition mobilizing in South Central had to explicitly address the economic issues between residents and shopkeepers in order to defuse the racial tension in the neighborhood.

Economic development was a shared interest for all community members regardless of race. As groups came together to work out an economic plan and confront a hostile media environment, they began to form a foundation for future relationships.

For more information about this effort, contact Karen Bass, Executive Director of the South Central Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment at (213) 750-9087.

Lesson #2

It is important to understand and acknowledge diversity within racial groups.

Improving race relations is often thought of as improving interactions between different racial groups. In fact, bridging the diverse cultural and ethnic issues within the same race has also been an unacknowledged challenge. Effective collaboration on broad community issues requires groups to acknowledge and bridge cultural and class differences within races and immigrant groups.

The area surrounding Gallup, New Mexico, is home to three distinct Native American tribes. The Zuni, Navajo, and Acoma Pueblo Nations all have their unique and specific cultures, traditions, and languages. They have all been disastrously affected by common problems of excessive alcohol use and abuse, and each tribe has had its own unique and separate way of dealing with it. The Navajo and Acoma Pueblo Tribal Councils outlawed alcohol sales on their reservations. The Acoma Pueblo Nation started a gambling casino to build economic independence and reduce unemployment and associated alcohol abuse.

The three groups did collaborate however, when they were presented with an opportunity for an independent effort to focus specifically on reducing substance abuse. They formed the Native American Task Force to coordinate the interests of Native Americans in the Northwest New Mexico region's Fighting Back project. This taskforce served as a vehicle for informing the tribal governments and expressing their distinct interests in the development and implementation of the project. According to the Native American groups, it is because the distinct tribes had bridged their own differences both within and among their own tribes that they were able to effectively join with the broader Fighting Back project that included White and Latino groups from the nearby towns.

Other participants reported that their communities have had to work through similar experiences with ethnically and culturally diverse communities within racial groups. In San Francisco, Vallejo, and Los Angeles, there are major cultural variations among Latinos — Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, and Nicaraguan — as there are major cultural differences among Asians — Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Pacific Islanders.

Stories shared at the conference illustrated that language, culture, income, class, and geographic locale influence how people perceive and experience the world.

Participants from Mobile, Alabama, reported political and class divisions distinct within both White and Black groups — Old South versus New South; working class versus middle and upper-income classes; conservative versus liberal politics. It is important to acknowledge these differences within racial groups, as well as to understand their implications for a community-wide strategy to reduce substance abuse.

For example, the city of San Francisco provided separate funds to different racial and ethnic groups to work on their own respective substance abuse issues within their own ethnic and racial context. Leaders quickly realized that in order to accomplish their goals, each group would have to focus on specific tasks with measurable objectives and surmount internal challenges. Once these distinct groups were able to accomplish real progress and success within their own circles, they could then begin to establish and work toward a larger common vision with peers from other racial groups.

These six communities are not unique in their encounters of diversity within racial groups. According to President Clinton's Initiative on Race, there are over 100 diverse ethnic and racial groups represented in communities across America. Community leaders need to recognize and acknowledge the cultural nuances within groups to effectively bring people from various experiences together to work collectively.

The Lessons Learned Conferences

The information in this newsletter reports the proceedings from a conference convened by Join Together in the spring of 1998. Support for the conference was provided by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This conference was the final seminar of a three-part series to explore promising practices and systemic change. The series reports will be widely disseminated to groups around the nation to share information about programs, strategies, and other "lessons learned" that are making a difference in reducing substance abuse.

The first conference, held in the spring of 1997, addressed how communities' efforts to reduce substance abuse have affected health care.

The second seminar, held in the fall of 1997, examined how communities' efforts to address substance abuse have affected civic infrastructure.

Copies of the conference reports are available by calling Join Together at (617) 437-1500. You can also download copies of the newsletters from Join Together Online at www.jointogether.org. To do so, go to the Resource Finder, which is part of the Resource Section of JTO Substance Abuse.

The following groups shared their stories of how efforts to reduce substance abuse have influenced race relations in their communities.

South Central Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment

Los Angeles, CA

Karen Bass, Executive Director

(213) 750-9087

Coalition for a Drug Free Mobile County

Mobile, AL

Larry Hyde, Executive Director

(334) 438-5707

Northwest New Mexico Fighting Back, Inc.

Gallup, NM

Raymond Daw, Executive Director

(505) 863-9953

Project Neighborhood

Kansas City, MO

Keith Brown, Executive Director

(816) 842-8515

San Francisco Community Partnership

San Francisco, CA

Keith Choy, Deputy Director

Mayor's Criminal Justice Council

(415) 554-6558

Vallejo Fighting Back Partnership

Vallejo, CA

Jane Callahan, Executive Director

(707) 648-5230

Lesson #3

It is important to involve community residents and institutional leaders as participants of equal stature.

Informal social networks of people who live and work in a neighborhood or community are often disconnected from formal institutions. Often characterized as grassroots, the people who comprise these informal social networks must be involved and welcomed in the processes that define the nature and scope of substance abuse in their communities. They must also be involved in planning and executing the strategies to effectively reduce the incidence of substance abuse and associated problems.

Project Neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri, is an example of a community-based effort that has a high level of input and participation from local residents and grassroots leadership. However, this has not always been the case. Initially, the Kansas City project had to address racial tensions between the white power structure of the private sector and administrative institutions and the primarily African American target neighborhoods involved in the project before it got to where it is today.

Local residents and leaders from the Santa Fe neighborhood of Kansas City were frustrated at having been excluded from the Project Neighborhood planning process led by the Kansas City Community Foundation. The foundation, however, needed information directly from the African American neighborhood residents to prepare an application for outside funding. When community leaders came to realize that this information provided leverage to confront the foundation, things began to change. Grassroots leadership and resident activists fought to hold the foundation accountable to the community. Local leaders demanded to participate in the grant writing and decision-making processes of Project Neighborhood. Neighborhood residents claimed an equal one-third representation on the advisory board beside city institutions and agencies.

Community residents succeeded in changing the process for Project Neighborhood. They then turned their attention to the Kansas City Community Foundation. As an organization, the Kansas City Community Foundation, with its resources and city connections, needed to recognize and support the community's participation throughout its institutional efforts. Barb Friedman, who had just been appointed project director of Project Neighborhood, understood the importance of community participation and helped open the foundation to include grassroots involvement. The process of applying for the Fighting Back grant was the foundation's first step toward substantive shared control with community members. A grant writer was hired to help the community residents and groups write the grant, but the strategies and planning all came from the community.

Jan Kreamer, Executive Director of the Kansas City Community Foundation, also began to meet and form relationships with grassroots leaders and organizations. As the foundation and community groups developed mutual respect and trust, Project Neighborhood was able to move forward. "Because we were from the neighborhood, it did not mean that we were not professionals also," says Jim Nunnelly, a resident and program administrator for anti-drug efforts in Jackson County. "Once the foundation discovered new neighborhood leadership, they were willing to take more risk." Today, there is no mistaking the grassroots efforts involved in running Project Neighborhood. And grassroots leaders in Kansas City describe their relationship with the foundation as one of mutual respect and understanding.

Project Neighborhood's experience illustrates two lessons. First, actively seeking out and listening to the knowledge and experience of neighborhood leaders is essential to effectively addressing substance abuse issues in communities. Second, it is also important to have the leaders who represent resources and political will re-examine the normal course of business and their willingness to support initiatives that are born of neighborhood leaders' visions and strategies. In developing and maintaining this balance of power, groups must explore how issues of race, privilege, and prejudice play out in their systems, organizations, and interactions. As a result of their experience with Project Neighborhood, the Kansas City Community Foundation has changed its philosophy of organization from a top down hierarchy to a bottom-up community-based effort.

Successful efforts require the involvement of people and leaders from the target communities as staff, board members and as constant advisers. None of the six programs presented here operated with central leadership external to the communities where changes had to be made. Program design and leadership must come from within communities. If local people are not substantially involved in fixing the problem, then efforts may not succeed. Building trust, establishing the hundreds of informal working relations and agreements, inspiring grassroots support, bridging racial and cultural barriers, and generating hope are not things that can be directed or made to happen from outside a community or neighborhood.

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Grassroots Efforts in Gallup Lead to Promising Practices

In northwest New Mexico, grassroots involvement was instrumental in developing strategies and implementing programs that were culturally appropriate to Native American tribal traditions and cultures.

The National Indian Youth Leadership Project emphasizes traditional Native American values such as service to the community. This program was developed with Navajo elders who believe that certain negative topics such as alcohol and drugs should be addressed indirectly, by building positive self esteem. "Our objective is for youth to see themselves and to be seen as playing a positive role in the community. This is the culturally appropriate way," says McClellan Hall of the National Indian Youth Leadership Project.

Such grassroots-led initiatives have had some positive results. The excess risk of dying from alcohol related causes has declined in the Northwest region from 225 percent twenty years ago to 17 percent. This change is attributed to the work of residents in the Native American communities who have focused on primary and secondary prevention strategies to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in the towns and on the reservations.

For more information contact Raymond Daw, Executive Director of Northwest New Mexico Fighting Back, Inc. at (505) 863-9953.

Lesson #4

Local governments can be instrumental in facilitating constructive community efforts.

Local governments that recognize and support community mobilization efforts bring key resources to the table. External grants cannot take the place of close collaboration between community residents and city agencies.

Community leaders in Vallejo, California, reported a history of distrust and unresolved issues between the city government and minority communities that stymied the progress of initiatives. A perceived lack of recognition and poor response from city officials regarding neighborhood concerns about drug abuse and trafficking eroded and destroyed the trust and faith of community members in their municipal government.

Community leaders explained that the turning point came when new city leadership instituted community partnership forums. These forums gave voice to the community's frustration with past inaction and required officials to acknowledge the alcohol and drug problems in the neighborhoods. Recognition by local government and support generated from these forums also motivated grassroots groups to generate their own solutions to problems. The council members listened and advocated with the community. This was extremely valuable to rebuilding the trust and faith of grassroots minority constituencies.

Programs based in city offices that respect and acknowledge the leadership of grassroots efforts and voters work because the local government has the resources and the responsibility to share power and decision-making with the community.

In both Vallejo and San Francisco, the municipal government had the lead role in funding and mobilizing communities around substance abuse initiatives. These cities brokered resources in a strategic manner to support community efforts within the various racial and ethnic groups. With fiscal and institutional support, these community groups began to set changes in motion to achieve and sustain a reduction in substance abuse.

The circumstances in Mobile, Alabama, were very different from those in San Francisco and Vallejo. Historically, African American neighborhoods in Mobile had little power or support from local government. An antiquated and restrictive electorate process blocked African Americans from any representation or political power. There was no vehicle to allocate resources to address the concerns of African American neighborhoods. In 1985, the Federal court ordered Mobile to change the electoral process. The African American neighborhoods then succeeded in electing African American representatives to the city council. Community leaders report that the Coalition for a Drug Free Mobile County, formed in 1989, became a driving force for mobilizing African American neighborhoods to secure the newly accessible power and support.

Mobile illustrates how government structure can have a role in restraining or enabling community power. This changed electoral system was a vehicle for social change in Mobile. Some of the newly elected officials have also had leadership positions in the coalition. As African American community leaders have become elected officials, they have helped to assure responsiveness of local government to issues in their communities.

There is a lot of talent and creativity in local neighborhoods, which needs to be coupled with a commitment by local government officials to provide resources to document the nature of substance abuse problems and to support comprehensive solutions.

Fighting Back to Reduce the Demand for Alcohol and Drugs in Gallup, New Mexico

Prior to Fighting Back, Native Americans were not represented in local government and the flow of resources was controlled by politicians and business owners that were predominantly White and Latino.

Now however, Native American tribes located around Gallup have mobilized to address various issues and Native American representation on city and county governments has increased dramatically in the last five years. They have helped to reallocate the control and flow of resources to support strategies that reduce substance abuse in the reservation communities and change the systems of politics and business in the town of Gallup to support further collaboration.

For further information contact Raymond Daw, Executive Director of Northwest New Mexico Fighting Back, Inc. at (505) 863-9953.

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HOW YOU CAN APPLY THE LESSONS LEARNED IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

The six communities highlighted throughout this newsletter show how groups that come together to address substance abuse problems can also have an impact on race relations. When groups of different backgrounds and ethnic origins have the chance to work together toward a common cause, they can build new relationships. Substance abuse is a mobilizing force around which to rally diverse groups in your own community.

To help you get started, consider the following critical questions:

Q: Are there racially identifiable neighborhoods in your city or community?
Consider some of the other factors that characterize racially identifiable neighborhoods including economics, education level, social status, and politics.

Q: How does substance abuse impact different ethnic and racial groups in your city or community? Are there any similarities or differences in these problems? Are there substance abuse issues that cut across boundaries?
Does your city or community have a forum or speak-out where people can share their stories? If not, think about starting one.

Q: Are different racial and ethnic groups represented in collaborative efforts to address substance abuse?
Consider the formal and informal leaders in your city or community. What segments of the city or community do they represent? Do public commissions, task forces, and forums include representatives from different ethnic groups or races?

Q: How can collaboration work in a manner that ensures mutual respect for all members?
Consider issues of power and control in your collaborative efforts. Who is in charge? Is there balance between community residents and institutional leaders in decision making? Think about how lesson 3 plays out in your efforts.

One Person Can Make a Difference

Trash lay crumpled on the ground; graffiti marred the sidewalks and walls. These were the sights that a banker in Mobile, Alabama, saw every day as he passed through a rundown neighborhood on his walk to work.

One day he got tired of looking at the mess and decided to organize people to do something about it.

The man lived in an adjacent neighborhood, which was predominately White and affluent. The area he wanted to clean up was a low-income mainly African American community. Until then, both neighborhoods had kept to themselves, never mingling.

But the man, who now serves on the board of the Coalition for a Drug Free Mobile, put out a call to action to residents from both areas to come together to clean the neighborhood.

This effort was the beginning of a new partnership that continues today.

For more information on how grassroots efforts are bringing people from diverse racial groups together to revitalize communities in Mobile County, contact Larry Hyde at the Coalition for a Drug Free Mobile County at (334) 438-5707.

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Resources

The National Conference for Community and Justice

71 Fifth Avenue, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10003
212-206-0006
Email: nationaloffice@nccj.org
Website: www.nccj.org

The National Conference for Community and Justice, founded in 1927 as The National Conference of Christians and Jews, is a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry and racism in America. NCCJ promotes understanding and respect among all races, religions and cultures through advocacy, conflict resolution and education.

Study Circles Resources Center

PO Box 203
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The goal of the Study Circles Resources Center (SCRC) is to advance deliberative democracy and to improve the quality of public life in the United States. Write or call for information on services and publications, including training, "how-to" publications, consultations and networking services. They also distribute an article entitled "Bridging the Divides of Race and Ethnicity" reprinted from the Spring-Summer 1994 issue of the *National Civic Review*. This article clearly describes the combination of grassroots mobilization and institutional support that are necessary to creating social change around issues of racial and ethnic diversity.

President's Initiative on Race, "One America"

Website:
www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/OneAmerica_Links.html
Email: OneAmerica@whitehouse.gov

On June 14, 1997, President Clinton announced One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race. This initiative presents a year-long effort to create a stronger, more just, and more united American community. The website listed above will link you to Promising Practices—highlights of efforts designed to improve race relations. New efforts from a wide variety of sectors will be posted on this page. One of the most important goals of the President's Initiative on Race is to learn from community efforts and to share them with all Americans.

Program for Community Problem Solving

1319 F. Street, NW
Suite 204
Washington, DC 20004
Phone: (202) 783-2961
Fax: (202) 347-2161
Website: www.ncl.org/ncl/pcps.htm
Email: dcpcps@aol.com

The Program for Community Problem Solving is a division of the National Civic League that helps communities, and the organizations and institutions within them, to create collaborative solutions to shared problems. PCPS publishes a variety of helpful publications including *Facing Racial and Cultural Conflict: Tools for Rebuilding Communities*.

JOIN TOGETHER

Single copies of the newsletters and reports from all the Lessons Learned conferences are available free of charge. Other topics include how community efforts to fight substance abuse have affected healthcare and civic infrastructure. To obtain copies of any of these publications, contact:

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